



# IRAQ X. SHI'ITES OF IRAQ

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Iraq was the cradle of Shi'ism, where it evolved as a political and religious movement, yet, Shi'ites became a majority there only during the 19th century. Shi'ism emerged in Iraq when the first Imam, 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb (q.v.), drew his supporters from Kufa, his capital in 656-61. Following his assassination in 661, 'Ali was buried in nearby Najaf. The massacre of 'Ali's son, Imam Ḥosayn, and his companions on 10 Moḥarram 61/9 October 680—the crucial event of Shi'ism—took place in Karbalā', where he and his half-brother 'Abbās were buried after their uprising had been crushed. Both towns, together with Kāẓemayn, the burial place of the seventh and ninth Imams, Musā al-Kāẓem and Moḥammad al-Jawād, and Samarrā', where the tenth and eleventh Imams, 'Ali al-Naqi (q.v.) and Ḥasan al-'Askari (q.v.), are buried, are called the *'atabāt-e 'āliyāt* (exalted thresholds; see ['ATABĀT](#)) and are regarded as the holiest sites for Twelver Shi'ism.

*The Proto-Shi'ite era.* The first Shi'ites, 'Ali's supporters in Kufa, were comprised of veteran believers, named Qur'an readers (*al-Qorā'*), and new Muslim converts among the Arab tribes. According to Michael Morony (pp. 492-94), this support cannot be ascribed to Arab traditions or to the Kalb-Qays (South-North) tribal divisions. Rather, some elite members, whose position was threatened because of the rise of the new Arab elite under the third Caliph, 'Oṭmān (r. 644-56), supported 'Ali's family hoping to rescue their



position. The other aspect was the social polarization of the population as a whole, which led some Arabs to see ‘Ali’s family as the symbol of their hopes to restore social and economic justice. Staying with ‘Ali, despite his misfortunes, required a special explanation, the attribution of charismatic qualities as Moḥammad’s heir (*wāret*) and executor (*waṣi*), with some of his followers (e.g., Solaymān b. Ṣorād) going as far as describing him as a rightly guided one (*Mahdi*) (Morony, pp. 492, 495) or saying that he was Moḥammad’s closest assistant.

Kufan notables (*aṣrāf* and *ro’asā’*) invited Ḥosayn to lead a rebellion against the Omayyads in 680, but refrained from helping him, fearing the approaching Omayyad army. Following the massacre of Ḥosayn and his followers, 3,000 Kufans, known as the *Tawwābun* (penitents), went to die in battle against the Omayyads, in order to atone for their sin of having forsaken Ḥosayn. Their act rendered the massacre of religious significance and served to transform Shi’ism into a distinct branch of Islam.

With the Shi’ite banner providing the ideological justification for those rejecting the status quo, Kufa continued to serve as the center of opposition to the Syrian domination of the Arab empire. Most significant was the revolt of Moḳtār b. ‘Obayd in 685-86 in the name of ‘Ali’s son Moḥammad (Moḥammad Ebn al-Ḥanafīya), which was supported by dissident tribesmen, *mawāli* (clients), and slaves, in addition to Kufan notables (*aṣrāf*), who later abandoned him because of the growing importance of slaves and *mawāli*. Eventually, Moṣ‘ab b. Zubayr, military leader of the Medina-led rebellion against the Omayyads, defeated Moḳtār, massacring about 6,000 of his supporters in April 687.

By the early 8th century, Kufa and Madā’en (q.v.) were the main Shi’ite centers in Iraq, with Kufa serving as the center for the failed revolt in February 740 of Zayd b. ‘Ali (half-brother of the fifth Shi’ite Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer), founder of the *Zaydiyya*. The 8th century also saw the emergence of extremist Shi’ite groups (*ḡolāt*, q.v.) in Iraq that fused pagan and Islamic beliefs manifested in the attribution of divinity to ‘Ali. At that stage they acquired greater support than the future Imami Shi’ites.

That the many claims of the various branches of the Hashemite family—Moḳtar, descendants of Ḥosayn and Ḥasan, and the future ‘Abbasids—for a special right to rule were able to attract Shi’ite sympathy during the 8th century indicate that most people did not give special



importance to direct descent from 'Ali. Rather, discontent with Omayyad rule and socio-political considerations were the crucial factors. The only successful revolt on behalf of descendants of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*, q.v.), brought the 'Abbasids to power, leading to a split between them and the 'Alid supporters, among them the future Twelver Shi'ites.

The first 'Abbasid Caliphs, Saffāḥ (r. 749-54) and Maṣṣūr (r. 754-75) sought to win over the 'Alids by having them as honored guests at their court with high pensions. Shi'ite sources, however, maintain that Maṣṣūr harassed the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq (d. 765), and had him imprisoned several times. Some members of 'Ali's family, who saw the 'Abbasids as usurpers and refused to give up their claim, went into hiding. From this position they attracted the allegiance of those who were dissatisfied with 'Abbasid rule. Most notable was Moḥammad b. 'Abd-Allah, called "the Pure Soul" (*al-naḥs al-zakiya*) from the Ḥasanid branch. His brother Ebrāhim led a revolt on his behalf in Basra in October 762. Although he received some aid from Kufa, he was defeated in February 763. The old 'Alid constituency of discontented Iraqis, especially Kufans, was now hopelessly divided by Maṣṣūr's claims to lead the *Ahl al-Bayt*, by the establishment of Iraq as the center of government, and by differing views among themselves about their role in the community.

The Imamate of Ja'far al-Ṣādeq, which marked the major doctrinal development of Imami Shi'ism, had a profound impact on Shi'ite-'Abbasid relationships. As Ja'far elaborated the concept of the *emāma* as a spiritual leadership that stands above political rulers and postponed his claim for actual authority to the distant future, his followers could acquiesce to 'Abbasid rule. The Imams whom they recognized lived quietly under the 'Abbasids, although at times there were under confinement in the capital.

Under the 'Abbasids, relationships between the Shi'ites and the ruling dynasty fluctuated according to the changing policies of each Caliph. The Caliph Maḥdi (r. 775-85) attempted to heal the rift by granting the 'Alids estates and by promoting their supporters to high positions in his bureaucracy. Conversely, Shi'ite sources maintain that Rašid (r. 786-809) had hundreds of 'Alids killed. Yet, some pro-'Alid families, such as Ja'far b. Moḥammad al-Aṣ'at held high positions in the Caliph's court.

The Caliph Ma'mun (r. 813-33) made the most serious effort to reconcile the 'Alid and 'Abbasid branches of *Ahl al-Bayt* by marrying his daughter to the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rezā (q.v.) and designating him as his successor. While



encountering opposition among 'Abbasid branches, his decision failed to generate much support among 'Alids, since it promised no change in the unpopular policy of rule from Khorasan. With the death of 'Ali al-Rezā in 818, the plan for a Shi'ite succession was abandoned. The Caliph Motawakkel (r. 847-61) even adopted a strong anti-'Alid policy as part of his struggle against his father's entourage. Seeking public support among the Traditionists in Baghdad, he ordered the public cursing of 'Ali from the pulpits and the destruction of his descendants' tombs in Karbalā'.

Several processes led to the evolution of Shi'ism as a full-fledged religious sect during the 9th-10th centuries. Still, up to the 9th century, the Imamis were a minority among the Shi'ites, compared with the Zaydis and *Golāt*. The establishment of Baghdad as the 'Abbasid capital in 762 led to the growth of a large Shi'ite community in Kark, a quarter situated on the west bank of the Tigris river, and to the expansion of religio-political affiliations to the communal sphere. Under 'Abbasid rule, the Imams developed networks of agents (*wokalā*) in order to facilitate communication with their followers and to collect the *ḳoms* ("the fifth") and *zakāt* (alms) taxes, thereby creating the basis for a continuous existence of the Shi'ite community in the future.

A corollary development was the growing importance of the visitations (*ziārāt*) to the tomb of Imam Ḥosayn in Karbalā' as a basic element in Shi'ite identity. In the first decades following Ḥosayn's death, the visitation was observed mainly by the Imams and their families. By the 9th century, the Imams had institutionalized the practice of *ziārat al-'āšurā* and *ziārat al-arba'in* on the major Shi'ite observances (see ['AŠURĀ](#) and [ARBA'IN](#)). They highlighted the future heavenly rewards which awaited the visitors to the burial sites and attributed blessing and healing power to its soil.

The death of the eleventh Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari in 873 in Samarrā', to the mind of most of the Imamis apparently without leaving a successor to the leadership of their community, caused a major theological and communal crisis among them and led to splits into up to 14 factions over the issue of the succession. The theory of the Occultation (*Ġayba*) of the twelfth Imam, developed by Kolayni (d. 940/41) and above all by Shaikh Mofid (d. 1022) of Baghdad, became the most prevalent idea among the Shi'ites during the 10th century, marking the rise of the their ulema as leaders of the community. This theory was furthermore supported by powerful 'Alid families, as it enabled them to cooperate with the 'Abbasids while keeping spiritual allegiance to 'Ali's family. Enjoying the backing of the heterodox bureaucrats of al-



Moqtader's caliphate (r. 908-32), the Shi'ites enjoyed communal resurgence, prompting strong Hanbalite reactions. In 935, the Caliph Rāzi (r. 934-40) was obliged to issue a decree to prevent the Hanbalites from attacking them.

The takeover of Iraq by the pro-'Alid Buyid dynasty (945-1055; see [BUYIDS](#)) marked the full-fledged consolidation of Twelver Shi'ism as a system of belief and as a distinct religious community within Islam. Although they did not challenge openly 'Abbasid nominal suzerainty and Sunnite ideology, the Buyids extended patronage to Shi'ite scholars and favored the Shi'ites in their policies. Shi'ite intellectual activity was centered in Baghdad, especially in the commercial center of Kark, as scholars from the entire Muslim world, such as Shaikh al-Ṭā'efa Moḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭusi, resided there. In addition, Bahā'-al-Dawla's vizier Šābur b. Ardešir, established a major Shi'ite library there in 991-92. Both the Imamis and the Zaydis profited from Buyid patronage. However, the former were the more numerous group and devoted themselves more assiduously to the study of law and tradition, while the Zaydis were absorbed into the Mo'tazelite group of theologians in Baghdad.

Pro-Shi'ite Buyid policies proved decisive in exacerbating the hitherto unorganized Shi'ite-Sunnite tension. Mo'ezz-al-Dawla split the *Neqābat al-ašraf*, or "office of superintendent of the Prophet's descendants," which included the 'Abbasid and 'Alid branches, by appointing a Shi'ite as head of its 'Alid branch and leader of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. With the added duty of supervising the *Mazālem*, or "court of appeals," the 'Alid *neqāba* was directly involved in the government structure of the city and was able to displace the 'Abbasid group in public affairs. In addition, it could rally the support of the Shi'ite *aḥdāt* and *'ayyārun*, armed bands from the lower levels of the population. Mo'ezz-al-Dawla also appointed in 961-62 a Shi'ite as chief judge (*qāzi al-qoḏāt*) in Baghdad, who served for only a short while. Subsequently, the Caliph Qāder (r. 991-1031) was able to thwart Bahā'-al-Dawla's attempt to appoint another Shi'ite as chief judge in 1004. Still, there existed a special judge in Mosul for the Imamis, and there were probably also some more in other towns in the south.

Buyid backing encouraged the appearance of new public manifestations of the Shi'ite creed, particularly the public disavowal (*barā'a*) of the first two Caliphs Abu Bakr (r. 632-34) and 'Omar (r. 634-44), the public 'Āšurā' (q.v.) mourning ceremonies for al-Ḥosayn on 10 Moḥarram, and the celebration of Ġadir Kōmm on 18 Du'l-Hejja. Pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams (*'atabāt*) became a large-scale phenomenon manifested *inter alia* in extensive building



at the shrines in Kāzemayn. Burial in Karbalā' as a pious act became increasingly popular.

Processions on Shi'ite holidays provided flash points for sectarian riots in Baghdad, which erupted in 949, 951, 959, 962, and 964, apparently as part of 'Abbasid effort to rally opposition to the Buyids. The rivalry reached a breaking point in the crisis of the Buyid amir Baḳtiār's reign from 972. (Ebn) Meskawayh (q.v.), a contemporary observer, noted that the dispute between the two factions, which had formerly been on religious questions, turned political as well, as the Shi'ites sided with Daylamite troops, while the Sunnites supported the Turkish units. The conflict exacerbated the division of cities into Shi'ite and Sunni quarters, each under a shaikh associated with armed bands.

The new rites, in addition to the formation of a corpus of distinctive Shi'ite Hadith, and, based on that, of jurisprudence (*feqh*), served to define the Shi'ites as a distinct community or religious sect, with the Muslims of Iraq being divided into two increasingly hostile camps, distinguished by peculiar formulae and prescriptions. While the Shi'ites called themselves *al-emāmiya*, their rivals termed them *al-rāfeza*, for their rejection (*rafz*) of Abu Bakr, 'Omar, and most of the Companions of the Prophet.

The 1055 takeover of Baghdad by the Sunnite Saljuqs and the Buyid demise marked the end of the Shi'ite century and the beginning of the Sunnite revival in the eastern Muslim world. Following the Saljuq conquest and the pillaging of his house and library, Shaikh Ṭusi (d. 1066/67) left Kark for Najaf, which emerged as the major Shi'ite center until the death of his grandson Moḥammad b. Ḥasan in 1145.

The powerful Saljuq vizier, Neẓām-al-Molk, was the principal opponent of the Shi'ites championing the building of Sunnite seminaries (*madāres*) in Baghdad. Only after his assassination in 1096 was the pressure on the Shi'ites lifted. The reassertion of caliphal power following his death, culminating in al-Nāṣer-le-Din-Allāh's reign (1180-1225), improved the Shi'ites' lot, as various 'Alid families gained influence at the court.

The Buyid period saw the emergence of semi-independent emirates in Iraq. Most powerful was the bedouin Shi'ite Mazyadid dynasty of the Banu Asad tribe. The Buyids recognized them as amirs in 1012, but they came into their own only during Saljuq rule. Their rule ended with the death of Amir 'Ali in 1150. Another Shi'ite dynasty, the 'Oqaylids, ruled in Mosul from 990 until



about 1096.

The Mazyadid capital Ḥella, established in 1102, became an important Shi'ite center of learning under Ebn Idris Ḥelli (d. 1202), who was the first to express views opposed to those of Shaikh Ṭusi. He in turn was followed by Moḥammad b. Ja'far Ḥelli (d. 1239 or 1248) and his son Ja'far b. Moḥammad (d. 1281). Subsequently, Iraq lost its primacy as the center of Shi'ite learning.

The rise of Safavid Iran in 1501 and the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad in 1534 transformed Iraq into a battle zone between the rival empires. The struggle for political supremacy was expressed in the terms of the Sunnite-Shi'ite strife, with the 'Atabāt perceived as a prize by the Safavids. The two periods of Safavid rule over the 'Atabāt (1508-34 and 1622-38) resulted in some construction work in the shrines, although the Safavids cultivated Isfahan and Mashad as major centers of learning and pilgrimage. Shi'ism in Iraq at the time was confined to the cities, where only a small minority of the population lived, and among a few tribes.

The 18th century marked a turning point in the history of the Shi'ites of Iraq. The fall of the Safavids and the crisis in Iran drove ulema to migrate from Iran and Bahrain to the 'Atabāt. The failure of Nāder Shah (r. 1736-47) and Karim Khan Zand (r. 1751-79) to take over Iraq and the weakness of the Ottoman-Mamluk government in Baghdad provided the Shi'ite ulema there with sufficient latitude to build important centers of study without government interference. The growing number of pilgrims and improved supply of water provided the necessary financial and physical infrastructure for learning. Finally, the demise of Aḳbārism (see [AḲBĀRIYA](#)) and the reemergence of Oṣulism as the major legal doctrine prevailing among Twelver Shi'ites enabled their ulema to exercise a greater religious and communal role.

From the late 18th century to the mid-20th century the 'Atabāt functioned as the leading centers of learning and religious leadership for the Twelver Shi'ite world, attracting also students from other Shi'ite communities abroad. Unlike Ottoman or Persian theological seminaries (*madā-res*) that relied mainly on charitable trusts (*awqāf*), the 'Atabāt were sustained primarily by donations from pilgrims and believers, as well as by the massive burial industry. Hence they were oriented toward the communities of believers rather than towards the state.

The Ottoman-Safavid political rivalry, as well as Persia's claims to be the



rightful protector of Shi'ite interests in Iraq, aroused suspicions on the part of Istanbul towards the Shi'ites, particularly their ulema, as agents and potential allies of Iran. The Ottomans never granted the Shi'ites the status of an independent religious school (*madhab*) or community (*millet*), but regarded them as sinning Muslims. Concurrently, they sought to extract the maximal revenue from the growing Shi'ite pilgrimage to the 'Atabāt. Hence, they never went too far in their anti-Shi'ite measures. Facing hostile Sunnite Ottoman rule, the Shi'ite ulema often had to resort to Iranian and British mediation and pressure vis-à-vis the Ottomans in order to offset discriminatory measures, and were therefore obliged to adopt a more quietist attitude toward the Qajars than their colleagues in Persia. Thanks to the growing Indian-Shi'ite population in the 'Atabāt, the British were sympathetic to Shi'ite plight and sufficiently influential to gain concessions from the Ottomans.

Mamluk policies towards the Shi'ites were shaped by their military strength and the constraints of Ottoman-Iranian relations. Taking advantage of Mamluk weakness towards the end of the 18th century, the 'Atabāt avoided paying taxes for several years. Likewise, Shi'ites in Karbalā' practiced the cursing and disavowal of the first three of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs" (*sabb wa rafz*). Subsequently, as the Mamluks feared Ottoman reprisals, Shi'ites in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra were at times denied free exercise of their religion religious practices.

The Wahhābi movement, which emerged in Najd during the second half of the 18th century, regarded the Shi'ite reverence for the Imams as polytheism. During the Ġadir Kōmm celebrations of 21 April 1801, the Wahhābis attacked Karbalā', killing about 5,000 people. Similar raids on Najaf in 1806 encountered stiff Shi'ite resistance, which was led by the *mojtahed* (see [EJTEHĀD](#)) Ja'far Āl-e Kāšef al-Ġeṭā'.

The Mamluks ruled Najaf by playing the local urban gangs—the Zukurt allied with the Āl-e Kāšef al-Ġeṭā' family and the Šomurt allied with the Mellāli clan—against each other. Karbalā' and Ḥella took advantage of the war between the governor Dāwud Pasha and Iran in 1825-26 to cease paying taxes. Dāwud subdued Ḥella but was forced to accept a compromise, mediated by the ulema, under which Karbalā' paid a lower tax, but retained its semi-independent status until 1843.

Thanks to the reverence they enjoyed in Iran, the *mojtaheds* of the 'Atabāt played mediating roles between Iran and the Ottomans in the 1806, 1812, 1818,



and 1821-22 conflicts. They then used their success to regain Ottoman tolerance for the holding for open *ta'zia* sessions in Najaf.

Relations between the Shi'ite ulema and their Sunnite counterparts were mostly antagonistic. Yet, as members of a minority which sought to attract believers from the majority, various Shi'ite ulema attended the classes of Sunnite jurists in Baghdad and even received *ejāzāt* (authorizations to teach) from them.

The massive tribal immigrations from the Arabian peninsula during the 18th century, ending with the 1795-1805 wave from the 'Anaza and the Šammar confederations, produced the most profound religious and sociopolitical changes in the Shi'ite community. As Yitzhak Nakash (pp. 25-42) has demonstrated, the consolidation of Shi'ism as a majority religion in Iraq took place only following the conversion of the bulk of the tribes.

The opening in 1803 of the Hendiya canal, thanks to funds provided by the Shi'ite rulers of Awadh in India, which brought water to Najaf from the Euphrates, attracted tribal settlement there. Concurrently, the Hendiya drained the Šaṭṭ al-Ḥella waterway, thereby ruining the semi-sedentary tribal communities on its banks, who were forced to move toward the Hendiya. This development expanded after 1831, due to the Ottoman policy to settle the tribes and transform them into tax-paying cultivators. The settlement process diversified the tribal economy and sharply stratified tribal society. The weakening of tribal structure and solidarity created a crisis of identity and a sense of displacement. Oppressed by their shaikhs, who became their landlords, and by the increasing taxation of the Sunnite government, the tribesmen were receptive to Shi'ite messages from the 'Atabāt that were attacking what was perceived by them as "government tyranny." By adopting the religious customs or by participating in the religious life of the nearby towns, they acquired a new sense of identity and self-respect.

The 'Atabāt had a particularly strong radiating power as centers of pilgrimage and trade and of energetic missionary activity by emissaries (*mo'man*) among the tribes. The conversion process was gradual, since it did not involve any formal act, but rather the adoption of Shi'ite practices. The missionaries encouraged the visitation of the shrines, the cult of Shi'ite saints, and the rituals of the commemoration of the slain Imam Ḥosayn. As Nakash has also demonstrated (pp. 142-54), they adjusted Shi'ite rituals to conform with Arab ideal attributes of manhood and tribal styles of celebration. Near Baghdad,



Shi'ite activities were curtailed, and Sunnite influence was stronger. Therefore, tribes that settled near it or further north did not convert.

The Ottomans reasserted direct control over Baghdad in 1831, but the 'Atabāt retained their de facto autonomy. When Karbalā' refused to accept an Ottoman garrison in 1843, the governor Najib Pasha subdued it, killing about 5,000 people and desecrating the shrines. Najaf had surrendered peacefully and thus escaped Ottoman reprisals.

From then onward, the 'Atabāt were subjected to Ottoman centralization policies that were intended to maximize government revenues, impose military conscription, encourage Iranian subjects to adopt Ottoman nationality, and demonstrate the superiority of the Ottoman legal system over the Shi'ite courts. While the Ottomans did not extend financial support to the Shi'ite ulema, they respected the autonomy of the Shi'ite *madrassa* (see xi, below) and its financial support system.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Ottoman authorities in Baghdad struggled with the tribes over taxation and control of the countryside. While Shi'ite tribes occasionally rebelled, these conflicts did not differ from those which used to occur frequently in the past between the Ottomans and Sunnite Arab or Kurdish tribes. Rebellious tribal coalitions cut across sectarian lines, while the Shi'ite ulema remained neutral or played mediating roles.

The Constitutional Revolution (q.v.) in Iran and the 1908 Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman empire politicized the ulema more than ever and elicited debates on constitutionalism and the political role of the clerics. Initially, most mojtaheds supported the constitutional effort, but gradually the majority, led by Sayyed Kāẓem Yazdi and supported by Arab tribesmen, turned against it. The minority, led by Āḳund Ḳorāsāni (q.v.), continued to support it.

Certain ecumenical Islamic tendencies appeared at the time, mainly because of the increase of the Western threat to the Ottoman empire and Iran and in response to Sultan 'Abd-al-Ḥamid II's (r. 1876-1909) pan-Islamic policies. Shi'ite mojtaheds issued fatwas supporting the Ottoman jihad against the 1911 Italian invasion of Libya, producing a wave of pro-Ottoman feeling. The mojtaheds also issued fatwas against the 1914 British invasion of Iraq following the outbreak of World War I. They called upon the tribes to join the Ottoman troops in defending *dār al-eslām*. Large numbers of Shi'ite tribesmen,



accompanied by ulema, joined the fight, but after the Ottoman defeat at Šo‘ayba in April 1915, most tribes left the war, and a few even switched sides. As sentiments increasingly turned against the Ottomans, the Šomurt and Zukurt gangs drove them out of Najaf in April 1915, dividing control in the town’s four quarters between themselves, with subsequent British consent. Karbalā’ followed suit in April 1916.

Following the British occupation of Iraq, various Shi‘ite leaders, mainly sayyeds and tribal shaikhs seemed amenable to the fact of British rule which replaced the Sunnite Ottoman regime. But the British policy of imposing tighter administrative control and growing opposition from the part of the ulema towards extended “infidel” rule over a Muslim land caused the estrangement of the Shi‘ites from the British.

The 1919-20 period, amid a power vacuum between Ottoman rule and the solidification of its British successor, produced an alliance between the Shi‘ite mojtaheds—most notably, Mahdi Kāleši, Moḥammad Šadr, and Moḥammad Taqī Širāzi—together with younger Shi‘ite teachers from the modern school *al-Madrasa al-Jacfariya* in Baghdad, which was founded in 1909, with the Sunnite Hashimites led by King Fayṣal, who were then in Syria. They agreed on forming an Arab Islamic state ruled by an Arab amir, bound by a legislative assembly. Whereas the Hashimites considered this formula an opening for their rule, the mojtaheds hoped to oversee the legislative process in a way similar to the 1906 Iranian constitutional model. Conversely, Sayyed Kāzem Yazdi opposed political activism, adopting a pro-British position, particularly when the British granted legal recognition to Shi‘ite courts as equal to those of the Sunnites.

The May 1920 declaration of the British Mandate over Iraq brought Shi‘ites and Sunnites together in calling for a revolt. A Shi‘ite-dominated society, *Ḥaras al-esteqlāl*, was formed with branches in Kāžemayn, Najaf, Ḥella, and Baghdad, calling for an independent Iraq under a Hashimite amir. Moḥammad Taqī Širāzi declared all service with the British illicit.

Concurrently, the introduction of the Tribal Civil and Criminal Disputes Regulation, which gave paramount tribal shaikhs the power to settle all disputes between their tribesmen and entrusted them with the collection of taxes, discriminated against middle and small shaikhs and sayyeds. Consequently, while the former refused to heed the mojtaheds’ calls for the revolt, most shaikhs with medium and small landed estates formed the



backbone of the anti-British movement. The links between the spiritual centers of the 'Atabāt and tribal leaders served to cast socio-economic considerations in an ideological mold which activated tribal values and evoked Islamic ideas.

The revolt was crushed by October 1920, costing the lives of about 6,000 Iraqis, most of whom were Shi'ites. Demonstrating short-term Sunnite-Shi'ite cooperation, it serves as the founding myth of Iraqi nationalism, yet its results proved disastrous to the Shi'ites. Fearing Shi'ite power and facing British superiority, the Hashimites and the Sunnite elites reached a compromise with the British, which secured their domination in Iraq under British tutelage. Attempts by the mojtaheds to thwart the 1922 British-Iraqi Treaty failed when the British deported Kāleši and Şadr and forced Moḥammad Ḥosayn Nā'ini and Sayyed Abu'l-Ḥasan Eşfahāni to a voluntary exile.

The formation of the Iraqi territorial state turned the Shi'ites into a numerical majority—about 56 percent according to the 1936 census with Sunnite Arabs constituting 22 percent and Kurds 15 percent—but also into a functional minority deprived of political and social power. Controlling the resources and coercive means of the modern state, King Fayşal and the British set out to co-opt the Shi'ites while ensuring Sunnite hegemony. Fayşal played the mid-ranking Arab mojtaheds against the Iranians and reconciled them by recognizing the Ja'fari rite in civil status cases. The government co-opted the tribal shaikhs by enhancing their authority as landlords and by giving them tax immunities. The increase in their economic welfare and political weight weakened their sectarian identity, as they, together with their Sunnite counterparts, emerged as a landowning class. Concurrently, their influence among their tribesmen decreased. In addition, the army's growing power was used to disarm the tribes.

During the 1920s, only one Shi'ite was usually appointed in each cabinet, on an average comprising 17.7 percent of the ministers. In the latter phase of the Iraqi monarchy, their share rose to 34.7 percent, but they were still excluded from real power. Out of the 58 cabinets in the period 1921-58, Shi'ites headed only five, and these too only during the twilight of the monarchy (1946-54). Since the Shi'ites did not undergo the same modernization processes as the Sunnite urban population, they lacked the manpower to compete for positions in the bureaucracy and military, while facing difficulties in penetrating the Sunnite networks of patronage. Consequently, though a majority, they held only 15 percent, of senior government positions during the 1930s and were



totally absent from the high ranks of the military.

Shi'ite ulema were discriminated against, as they did not have charitable foundations (*awqāf*) to the extent of those of the Sunnites. Public ceremonies, in particular those of 'Āšurā', were held under tight police control in Kāzemayn and Basra. In 1935, Prime Minister Yāsin Hāsemi tried to ban the Moḥarram ceremonies altogether, which resulted in the 1935 tribal insurrection. By the time of the end of the monarchy, in the late 1950s, the public Moḥarram observances lost much of their effectiveness as a political instrument. Concurrently, Iran under Reza Shah (r. 1925-41) sought to curtail pilgrimage to the 'Atabāt and promoted Qom as a rival religious center. While the number of students in Qom increased throughout the century, Najaf's student population plunged from some 8,000 early in the 20th century to less than 2,000 in 1957.

The struggle over defining Iraqi and Arab nationalism increased Sunnite-Shi'ite tensions. The Sunnites who adopted pan-Arabism as Iraq's official ideology cast doubt on the Shi'ites' ethnic origins and loyalty to Iraq. The latter, in turn, rioted against school curricula that glorified the Omayyads and implicitly insulted 'Ali and the Shi'ites. Most Shi'ites rejected a pan-Arabism that would have made them a small minority in a large Sunnite Arab state. Rather, they adopted over time an Iraqi identity, based on their ethnic identity, thus becoming perhaps the "ultimate" Iraqis, who only sought integration and fair share of resources, while the pull of Iran was presented by them as rather spiritual than separatist.

Socially, the Shi'ites experienced massive urbanization and expansion of education. At the beginning of the 20th century, they constituted about 25-33 percent of the Baghdad population, becoming 70 percent or about 2,000,000 by 2000. About 4,000,000, or 20 percent, lived in towns in the south. Still, they retained many of their customs, rituals, and tribal affiliations, which became mostly a form of identity and network for mutual help. In Baghdad they resorted to government education and courts rather than to Shi'ite institutions. Najaf and Karbalā' suffered economic setbacks, as they failed to develop alternative sources of income in place of the declining traditional sources of livelihood: pilgrimage, corpse traffic, and donations.

Politically, the Shi'ites never acted as a unified community. Under the monarchy, they did not establish or initiate Shi'ite parties or other political movements, such as *al-Nahḏa*, which operated intermittently in 1920 and had



pro-Shi'ite proclivities. Likewise, no bazaar-mosque alliance emerged, as was the case in Iran, even though the Shi'ite merchants took an important role in the state trade economy, following the 1951 Jewish exodus. Apparently, the merchants hoped that working with the king, as well as efforts to achieve a higher degree of integration in state institutions, would serve them better.

These divisions within Iraqi society under the monarchy produced three modes of Shi'ite political activity: (1) demands for equitable distribution of political, economic and cultural resources, as manifested in the 1932 memorandum submitted by the short-lived Shi'ite Executive Committee of Iraq, and *Miṭāq al-ṣā'eb* in March 1935; (2) the failed 1935-tribal revolt protesting the 1934 conscription law and the rigged elections that excluded Shi'ite tribal shaikhs, and the arrest of Shaikh Moḥammad Ḥosayn Āl-e Kāšef al-Getā'; (3) younger and radicalized Shi'ites joined the Communist Party or nationalist movements, hoping that they would overcome sectarian differences and solve the Shi'ite problem within the broader Arab or socialist context.

Shi'ites dominated the Communist party's rank and file and organization. Their share in the upper levels grew from 21 percent to 47 percent in 1949-55. Presumably, Communism was seen by many to appeal more to the Shi'ite sense of discrimination and struggle against oppression. Although pan-Arabism was less attractive, a Shi'ite, Fo'ād al-Rekābi, founded the Ba'th (Ba't) party branch in Iraq in 1952, and Shi'ites dominated the party's leadership until 1965, when the Sunnite Tikriti clique took over.

The 1958 revolution which toppled the monarchy resulted in two opposing repercussions for the Shi'ites. Himself a Shi'ite from his mother's side, President 'Abd-al-Karim Qāsem (in office 1958-63) eased discriminatory measures against them and sought to integrate them better in the military and bureaucracy. Qāsem's partial land reform improved the lot of the Shi'ite peasants. Likewise, he renovated the great Shi'ite slum in Baghdad by building *Madinat al-tawra*, the "City of the Revolution," thereby attracting larger numbers of rural migrants. On the other hand, the spread of secularization, Qāsem's close ties with the communists, and the new personal status law that gave greater equality to women alarmed the mojtaheds as threatening the foundations of Islam. The ulema in Najaf were divided between traditionalists, who advocated aloofness from politics, and activists preaching political involvement. The latter organized the *Ḥezb al-da'wa al-eslamiya* in 1959, backed by Moḥ-sen Ḥakim, the leading mojtahed of Najaf. Moḥammad Bāqer



Ṣadr became head of *al-Da'wa* in the early 1960s and later its “supreme jurist” (*faqih al-ḥezb*). The *Da'wa* called for an Islamic state ruled by the clergy already in the mid-1960s, while rejecting political claims based on Arabism, which it associated with the Ba'th regime. It professed allegiance to an Iraqi identity, which it viewed as essentially Islamic.

The seizure of power by the Ba'th party on 14 July 1968 exacerbated Sunnite-Shi'ite tensions. Although espousing secular Arab nationalist and socialist ideology, the Ba'th became one more vehicle for Sunnite-Arab domination over Arab Shi'ites and Kurds. Between 1968 and 1977, Shi'ites were systematically removed or kept away from all senior positions in the party and government and from the burgeoning oil wealth. Only after 1977, under the influence of Saddam Hussein (Ṣaddām Ḥosayn), were Shi'ites integrated in leadership positions more as co-optation than as actual empowerment.

However, three major reasons led subsequently to the aggravation of Shi'ite-Ba'thist relations: (1) The secularist Ba'thist ideology and policy; (2) the continuous exclusion of Shi'ites from the upper party and government echelons; and (3) the totalitarian nature of Ba'th system. The first crisis between the Shi'ites and the Ba'th erupted in June-July 1969 when Ayatollah Ḥakim refused the government's demand to issue fatwas denouncing the shah's new policy concerning the Iran-Iraq border at the Ṣaṭṭ al-'Arab. Consequently, the Ba'th regime began persecuting Shi'ite ulema through arrests, deportations, and executions. It shut down Shi'ite institutions and enforced strict censorship on religious publications. It restricted religious activities that involved mass gatherings, for example, the 'Āṣurā' mourning ceremonies, thereby eliciting anti-government riots in 1977 in the provinces of Najaf and Karbalā' and the Ṭawra township in Baghdad. It also confiscated lands from tribal shaikhs leading to few tribal insurrections in southern Iraq. In the early 1970s, some 60,000 Shi'ites “of Iranian extraction” were expelled to Iran. Concurrently, the regime co-opted pliant ulema, renovated the shrines in the 'Atabāt, and commemorated Shi'ite holidays but infused them with government messages. Moreover, it launched development projects in Shi'ite areas and promoted an Iraqi identity, which was preferred by most Shi'ites.

The 1978-79 Iranian revolution radicalized the *Da'wa*, as well as *Monazzamat al-'amal al-eslāmi* (founded in 1975) and *Mojāhedun* (founded in 1979), driving them towards armed struggle in an effort to topple the Ba'th and to establish an Islamic government in Iraq. While the three movements supported Ayatollah Khomeini, they saw themselves as Iraqi and did not seek merger



with Iran. Hence, they stressed the Islamic, not necessarily the Shi'ite, component of their ideology, as they feared a sectarian image. The regime responded with severe repression, arresting and executing hundreds of ulema and other activists, most notably Şadr himself, and members of the Ḥakim family. The number of students in Najaf dwindled to a few hundreds.

The Iran-Iraq War (see vii, above; 1980-88) increased Shi'ite suffering, as about 80 percent of Iraq's estimated 500,000 casualties were Shi'ites. Still, most Shi'ites identified themselves and fought as Iraqis, although they opposed Saddam Hussein, presumably because they were Arabs, and they were unenthusiastic toward Iran's system of politicized Islam. Conversely, Shi'ite soldiers tended to surrender more than Sunnites, and most Shi'ite families did not regard fallen Iraqi soldiers as martyrs (*şohadā*) killed in a war seen as holy, but rather as its victims. In November 1982 Ayatollah Moḥammad Mahdi Ḥakim formed in Iran *al-Majles al-a'lā le'l-tawra al-eslāmiya fi'l-'Erāq* (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) as the umbrella organization for all Islamic opposition movements. Some 10,000 Shi'ite prisoners of war joined its military wing, the Badr Brigade.

Shi'ites finally rose in revolt in March 1991, following Iraq's invasion of its neighbor Kuwait and its defeat in the subsequent war against a coalition led by the United States, which brought the Ba'th regime to the verge of collapse. The rebels comprised disaffected soldiers retreating from Kuwait, outraged citizenry, some ulema, and members of the Badr Brigade who infiltrated the country from Iran. Although the insurrection enjoyed broad support, many Shi'ites sided with the regime and took part in repressing it. For about two weeks, the rebels controlled southern Iraq, but, lacking organization, leadership, and resources, the Sunnite-dominated Republican Guards suppressed it brutally and effectively. Not only did the United States and Saudi Arabia ignore Shi'ites pleas for help, but Iran too refrained from giving any kind of active support, since it feared the renewal of the war with Iraq. This lack of support was perceived by large sections of the Iraqi Shi'ites as betrayal.

Reasserting its control during the 1990s, the Iraqi regime combined co-optation and harsh oppressive measure. It executed thousands of its own citizens and began draining the marshlands, forcing tens of thousands of the Shi'ite Marsh Arabs to flee to neighboring Iran. Iraqi Shi'ites also suffered disproportionately from the impact of the UN sanctions on their country, as the Ba'th regime channeled most of its resources to the Sunnite areas.



In Baghdad, Ayatollah Moḥammad Ṣādeq Ṣadr worked to reorganize the Shi'ites as a semi-autonomous community, re-establishing Shi'ite courts and re-instituting public Friday prayers despite government bans. He also worked with tribal leaders to find ways to address the issue of tribal customs and law within Shi'ite *feqh*. He was executed by the regime on 18 February 1999.

The toppling of the Ba'th regime, following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, provided the Shi'ites with the first opportunity in modern history to use their majority to become the dominant political players in Iraq and address some of their socio-economic grievances.

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